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485 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10017-6104 TEL (212) 972-4400 FAX (212) 972-0905
1522 K Street, NW, Suite 910, Washington, DC 20005-1202 TEL (202) 371-6592 FAX (202) 371-0124

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For Further Information

Sidney Jones (212) 972-2258 [w]
(718) 398-4186 [h]

Mike Jendrzeczyk (202) 371-6592 [w]
(301) 585-5824 [h]

Susan Osnos (212) 972-2257 [w]
(203) 622-0472 [h]

ASIA WATCH DISCLOSES STATE DEPARTMENT PRISONER LIST

The human rights organization Asia Watch today charged that the Bush administration's much-touted "breakthrough" last December in establishing a dialogue with the Chinese government on human rights issues had failed to produce any results. The Chinese have successfully stalled for the last six months on responding to a hitherto undisclosed State Department request for information on over 800 political prisoners. The charges were made as a visit by Secretary James Baker to China in mid-November was under discussion in Washington; Beijing is very eager that such a high-level and public meeting take place.

Asia Watch said that the State Department had prepared a list of over 800 names of people it believed to be detained or under some form of surveillance for

peaceful political or religious activities. The list was secretly presented to the Chinese embassy in Washington in May following a visit to Beijing by Robert Kimmitt, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. Asia Watch was told that when the State Department submitted the list, the U.S. called for the release of all those named, and also asked for information on the legal status of their cases and their current whereabouts. After months went by without a satisfactory response, the State Department pressed the Chinese government again and received a few statistics. To date, Beijing has provided no information on individuals, and the vast majority of those named on the May list remain in prison.

Asia Watch is gratified that the U.S. had expressed concern over the fate of two imprisoned dissidents, Chen Ziming and Wang Juntao, when the two went on a hunger strike in August. "Wang, at least, was moved to a hospital to get the medical treatment he needed," said Sidney Jones, Executive Director of Asia Watch. "It proves international pressure works." But the pressure needs to be sustained if we are to get releases or reductions in sentences for any of the others on that May list."

The list of more than 800 prisoners, which Asia Watch says is flawed but nevertheless contains most of the well-known imprisoned pro-democracy, Tibetan, and religious activists, was the second one submitted to the Chinese government. In December 1990, Assistant Secretary of State Richard Schifter presented a list of 150 names during his talks in China that were hailed as a "sea-change" in Chinese willingness to discuss human rights issues. "We gave the State Department the benefit of the doubt. We gave quiet diplomacy a chance to work. It failed utterly. The Chinese have used the threat of cutting off a non-existent 'dialogue' on human rights to blackmail the Bush administration into silence on political prisoners," said Jones.

Asia Watch calls for the submission of a corrected and updated list of all known prisoners detained for peaceful expression of their political or religious views before any visit by Secretary Baker takes place, and that he should avoid China altogether unless the Chinese are willing to make some credible commitment toward releasing those on the list.

In the six months since the list was first submitted, some 10 political and religious prisoners have been conditionally released, new arrests have been reported, including that of a student at Beijing University who tried to publish an underground paper, and information about hitherto unknown prisoners has emerged. One example, according to Asia Watch, is the case of Tibetan doctor Jampa Ngodrop, 45, who was sentenced in December 1990 to 13 years in prison for collecting names of people arrested or injured during pro-independence demonstrations in Lhasa in 1988 and passing them on to a "foreign resident." Information about his arrest and trial only reached the U.S. in August 1991.

"If the State Department is serious about addressing human

rights issues, it must make individual cases a permanent and very visible part of every bilateral discussion, and it must keep submitting lists, over and over and over until the people on those lists are free," said Jones.

Among the better known dissenters on the list submitted to China last May who remain in prison are the Democracy Wall activists Wei Jingsheng, Xu Wunli and Ren Wandong; 1989 pro-democracy activists Liu Gang, Wang Dan and Bao Zunxin; former adviser to deposed Communist Party Secretary General Bao Tong; Tibetan monk Yulo Dawa Tsering and Catholic Bishop Casimir Wang Milu of Gansu province.

Asia Watch was founded in 1985 to monitor and promote internationally recognized human rights in Asia. The Chair is Jack Greenberg and the Vice Chairs are Harriet Rabb and Orville Schell.

Asia Watch is a part of Human Rights Watch, which also includes Africa Watch, Americas Watch, Helsinki Watch, Middle East Watch and the Fund for Free Expression. The Chair of Human Rights Watch is Robert L. Bernstein and the Vice Chair is Adrian DeWind. Aryeh Neier is Executive Director and Kenneth Roth is Deputy Director.